

A 4, Fourth Sunday in Advent

Preacher: Billie Lyn Jensen
December 23, 2001

Ps 24 Who is the King of Glory?
Isaiah 7:10-17 A virgin shall conceive
Romans 1:1-7 Human descendent of God
Matt. 1:18-25 The birth of Jesus

(May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight, O lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.)

In two more days, it'll be Christmas. A time for family, homecomings, gifts, and good food. It's also a time of great expectations, fond memories, and special music.

One song, in particular, keeps running through my head: It's called "I'll Be Home for Christmas."

More than any other secular song, this one conjures up the feelings that I associate with this time of year. So much so that, every year, I find myself trying to create this song's ideal of a picture-perfect Christmas for my family...albeit...I've only had random success in controlling the snow.

But this year, several things have conspired against the perfect Christmas: This Advent, for example,

we've had house lights that keep going out,
a Charlie Brown Christmas tree that dropped all its needles as
soon as it came into the house,
a tree stand that busted when the second tree was brought home,
a flag pole that was torn off our house, twice, due to high winds...
and no time or inclination
(due to the usual events of day-to-day living)
to get into the spirit of things.

At a time when the children of the world were waiting for Christmas to begin, I was hoping that it would soon be over.

And that, believe it or not, got me to thinking about the beginnings and endings of lots of things.

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Like...life, itself.

After all, we're born, we grow old, and eventually...though we prefer not to think about it (especially during this time of the year)...we die.

We have a beginning and an ending.

But, did you know that the very young have a great deal in common with the very old? For one thing, both "being young" and being old" involve times of dependence on others for food, care, and housing.

Both involve a lack of worldly possessions: the child is born into the world with nothing, and an older person leaves this world with nothing.

In a truly wonderful way, the "oldness" and the youngness" of life are often tied together in memories. As I grow older, for example, I find that it is easier to remember the things that happened while I was young, rather than what happened yesterday...(I call them my "Senior Moments.")

It's as if the newborn has come from...and the older person is moving toward...the same point in time and space, that moment of birth. (Think of an unborn child and an elderly person, both getting fatter and losing their hair!)

If we think of life as a circle, then the beginning point and the ending point are One...the alpha and the omega; and it's at that point that God can enter into our lives.

There are many such points in time and space.

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One example is an event that occurred just a couple of days ago. Winter solstice marks that time, in any region, when the sun seems to be at its lowest point in the sky...when the sun's rays shine the most obliquely on the earth.

We "see" the sun as having reached its limit...its turning point...although, if one could view the whole event from outer space, it would be the earth's axis, rather than the position of the sun, that determines when the days cease their shortening.

But, whether viewed from our own perspective or from a larger one, it is a time when things change...sometimes, whether we want them to or not.

A turning point is also an alpha and an omega point. In the case of a solstice, it represents the end of one season and the beginning of another.

It's at this time of year that the church chose to celebrate a particularly important birth—one that represented a turning point for the world. The birth of someone who chose to care more about others than he cared about himself.

Every year, like those who have grown old and weary of this life, each one of us is called to "remember..."

to remember the "child"
the child in us...
 who will teach us to remember the child in Bethlehem...
 who will, then, teach us to see...
 and nourish
 the child in others...
 even though that child might be hidden..
 and, perhaps, still unborn.

Sometimes, we are called not just to remember turning points, but to cause them.

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Several years ago, a fellow worker (whose life had made him seem much older than his years) came into my office and was offended by all the pictures of unicorns on my walls.

He admonished me for these flights of fancy, and told me that I ought to **grow up!**

I raised my eyebrows, feigning surprise and asked, "You mean you don't believe in unicorns?"

"Of course I don't believe in them!"

"Why not?" I asked.

"How ridiculous!...Because they don't exist!"

"How do you know they don't exist?"

"Have you ever seen a unicorn?" he demanded.

"No," I answered thoughtfully, "but then, I've never seen an atom...or a molecule, either...and that doesn't mean that they don't exist."

There was (dare I say it?) a "pregnant" silence in the office...and then a burst of laughter...like a holy child being born.

(It was the first time I'd ever heard him laugh, by the way...but it wasn't the last.)

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And isn't that exactly why Jesus was born into the world?

So that the "old of heart" could remember what it was like to be young?

No! MORE than remember!

To re-live their lives...on His path...by beginning all over again. By turning around.

And, isn't that what we all try to do every Christmas?

To feel the newness? The joy and the wonder of believing in something that the world thinks is "impossible"?...just another unicorn?

Each of us is like a world unto ourselves. And at every turning point in our lives (which, on the circle, by the way, is EVERY point) God, the Alpha and Omega of our lives, can enter into our world...and be born, again, in our hearts.

We can't remember the birth of Jesus. After all, we weren't there 2000 years ago. Remembering is more than just being told about something; it implies "experiencing" it.

But we have experienced Christmas as a child...of anticipating Christmas morning, of believing that something wonderful would happen when we

woke on that particular day. No matter what happened, no matter what some of the "older" children told us, we believed. Year after year, we believed. (Why, some of us still do.)

(I remember wearing this bell *[show the congregation the bell tied on a red string and hanging around my neck]* to church one Christmas Eve many, many years ago.

I was sitting in the first pew, right in front of the lectern...so no one in the congregation could see it, but every time I stood or sat, a tiny jingle could be heard.

Later, one of the long time members of the church admitted to me...with some embarrassment...that she couldn't help but look up at the roof at each jingle...expecting to hear the sound of reindeer hoofs._

And that, my friends, is what this Sunday is all about: **expectation**...and a childlike belief in the certainty that something miraculous is about to happen, whether we call that "something" God or Santa Claus.

It's not the externals (like a name) but the essence, the depths...of **what's inside that counts**.

The birth of Jesus was so in tune with the universe that it set in motion the ability for each one of us (no matter how old we are...or how old we feel) to be young, again, to be born again...but this time, of the Spirit...

and, believe it or not, to have an **earthly parent** and a **spiritual one**...to be the younger brothers and sisters of that special child born in Bethlehem,

because this earthly church and, in fact all the churches of the world collectively house the **body of Christ**. And each one of us is a cell in that body.

Just as the Holy Spirit was a part of every cell of the baby Jesus, it is also a part of every cell of this pregnant church: a seed planted by the Holy Spirit...conceived in baptism...and fed through the placenta of the Holy

Eucharist; and we wait, and grow (in the knowledge and love of God) in the womb that this church represents.

This Mother Church, if you will, is the **human** part of our true lineage and God is the **spiritual** part. And at every turning point in our lives, at every beginning and ending, God is with us; but, just as He tried to enter into the many houses of Bethlehem, He knocks on the door of each of our hearts... and if there is room for Him, He can enter in.

If our hearts are humble, like the stable, He will be born in us that day.

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Christmas is not a once-a-year event, even though I've often tried to make it so.

Nor is it based on some idealized concept of what the world expects Christmas to be...although I've tried to meet that expectation, too...and, in most years, have failed rather miserably.

It is, however,

an incredible leap from what seems like a cliff and not falling...
It's making an impossible wish and having it come true...
looking at something through old and weary eyes and
suddenly seeing the sparkle and newness that was always
there...

It is

waking up and feeling good about the day, yourself, and everyone else.

It's

perhaps, seeing angels...and hearing them sing...
knowing that you will never die...grow old, maybe..
but at the last minute
before anything bad can happen,
being made new again...

It's having nothing left to fear...

It is all of these things and more.

So, expect them!

In fact, revel in the expectation...and turn and become like children; because, I tell you in God's Name, Be not afraid, for I bring you tidings of great joy which shall be for all people.

Christmas is almost here...and all the gifts of heaven are waiting to be opened...by each and every one of you!

Amen.